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## GERMAN AND AMERICAN SCHOOLS

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After the Battle of Jena, Germany, crushed and dismembered, was forced to seek within herself the sources of her revival. "We have lost our lands" said Friedrich Wilhelm II; "abroad our power and our glory have fallen; but it is our duty to regain that fallen glory. My wish therefore is that the greatest attention should be paid to elementary education." Normal schools for the training of teachers were organized; efficient school inspection was provided; school attendance was made compulsory; the reforms of Pestalozzi were welcomed and freely utilized; and educational statesmen like Humboldt, Fichte, Wolff, Diesterweg, and Von Raumer were enlisted in the common cause of improvement of the people's schools.

During the first half of the last century Germany experienced an awakening in the matter of elementary education—a real educational renaissance—which is one of the milestones in the history of education. John Griscom, Alexander D. Bache, William C. Woodbridge, Calvin E. Stowe, Lowell Mason, Horace Mann, and Henry Barnard—to name but a few of our leaders—made exhaustive and enthusiastic reports on the efficiency of the German elementary-school system; and in no small measure the United States profited by the methods and practices of our Teutonic cousins on the other side of the water.

In more recent years there has been a growing feeling on the part of American students of education that for at least a half-century the German elementary-school system has remained stationary, and that in the meantime such marked strides have been made in our own country as to leave the German elementary schools distinctly in the rear. This clearly has been the growing conviction of American students of German education during the past quarter of a century. A German-American has now come to the front, not only to challenge, but to disprove the modern view-point. The subject of his brochure is: "Why is the American common school unable to accomplish

what is attained by its counterpart in Germany?"<sup>1</sup> While published anonymously, the author states that he has lived fifteen years in our country; that he has been intimately identified with the work of our common schools; and that his sympathies for his adopted country are of the heartiest sort.

The German-American critic is profoundly convinced that our common schools accomplish distinctly less than similar schools in Germany; and with rare force and marked clearness he groups the causes under two general rubrics—the American community and the American teacher. The German community is homogeneous; the American community is heterogeneous, representing practically every branch of the Aryan ethnic tree. The acquisition of English consequently requires a disproportionate amount of time and energy, which in the very nature of things is poorly done. The American people are markedly roving and migratory in their habits, and children do not remain long enough under fixed and definite school conditions. School committees and boards of education are also transient in nature and fluctuating in policy. New boards of education are continually tinkering with the course of study, and the educational policies of such boards are not infrequently discarded by new boards. The American community grows too rapidly for its own good, and local governing boards do not have the foresight to provide for this rapid growth; in consequence, one finds in New York and other large cities altogether inadequate school accommodations.

There are some compulsory school laws in the United States, but they rarely compel attendance; hence the marked disparity between school enrolment and school attendance, varying from 30 to 50 per cent. The great weakness of the compulsory school-attendance laws is the lack of properly constituted truant officers. The people of the United States are so democratic that they not only argue that one man's child is as good as another's, but they assume that one man's child is as bright as another's; hence one finds few agencies for the training of children of diverse and unequal grades of mental ability. The bright and the stupid, the slow and the quick, are subjected to the same courses of study, with distinct loss to both classes.

<sup>1</sup>"Warum kann die amerikanische Volksschule nicht leisten, was die deutsche leistet?" *Sammlung von pädagogischen Vorträge*, Vol. XV, No. 2, 1905.

The brevity of the American school year, week and day, occasions surprise to all European visitors. The German-American critic points out that, whereas in Germany the school year is forty-five or forty-six weeks, the school week six days, and the school day six hours, in the United States the school year never exceeds forty weeks—and it is rarely more than thirty-five or thirty-six weeks—the school week numbers but five days, and the school day five hours or less. The German child has a school year of 1,580 hours, as against 1,000 hours for the American child. With 50 per cent. more time devoted to school work, the German child has a manifest advantage. And with the preparation of school tasks under normal conditions, the German child acquires intelligent and economic habits of study never attained by American children, who prepare much of their work at home under abnormal conditions.

The English language, already mentioned, presents real and profound difficulties. It is inconsistent and irregular, and requires years for its partial mastery. The German child learns to spell in a few months; the American child devotes years to spelling, and he rarely learns to spell correctly. The greatest loss is that which comes from the inability to take up a foreign language. While the American child is vainly endeavoring to master his mother-tongue, the German child gets a good start in a foreign language. It may be questioned whether this point is well taken. The English is profoundly difficult; but the American child begins a foreign language late quite largely because American parents have misconceptions of the educational value of language study. The author believes that we also lose about two years in teaching our irrational system of weights and measures; and of this, I think, there can be no reasonable question of doubt.

The American community regards the school as a sanitary hospital. Temperance advocates want the effects of alcohol and narcotics on the human system taught in the schools; and, without examining into its educational value, legislative bodies make such study compulsory in all the schools of a given commonwealth; workmen and mechanics think and act similarly with reference to teaching children the use of tools; merchants want their sons taught bookkeeping, and mothers demand that their daughters shall be taught housekeeping—in fact, the American school becomes a sort of dumping-ground for

every defect in society. What is the result? An army of high-priced specialists and inspectors, who dissipate the real working energies of the children.

Marked, however, as are the defects of the American community, the German-American critic regards the American teacher as the weakest prop in our whole educational scheme. First of all, she is wretchedly trained. The inefficiency of American teachers is proverbial. In the most favored part of the United States—the North Atlantic states—less than forty per cent. of the teachers have ever spent any time at a normal school; and in the southern tier of states this proportion drops to less than 8 per cent. One finds in the United States the rather amusing assumption that whenever God creates the demand for a teacher he gives the necessary intelligence to fill the post. The curse of local talent also keeps down efficiency. A second factor that militates against the employment of efficient teachers is the shoddy salaries paid. In most American states teachers are paid less than ordinary day laborers. The salary of teachers in such great and rich commonwealths as Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Wisconsin barely reaches \$300 a year. America is unduly lavish in her salaries of superintendents, inspectors, and special teachers, as well as in buildings, textbooks, and school supplies. She gets a manifestly inferior type of teaching, because she pays pauper wages. Low salaries bring frequent changes and an undesirable preponderance of women teachers. Competent men and more desirable women can be brought into the teaching ranks only by increasing salaries and providing for retiring pensions.

The preponderance of women teachers the German-American critic regards as fatal to educational efficiency. While naturally sympathetic, women are very sentimental, and they place too much emphasis on moral suasion to govern children well. The American child does not learn the principles of law and order so needed in the later life. In consequence, crimes of children are everywhere prominent, and the demand for children's courts is everywhere great. The author believes that in no small measure the feminization of education in the United States is directly responsible for the excesses noted in the destruction of property, lynching, and petty robberies. It will be admitted, I think, that the American child loses much in the way of

valuable training in habits of order and concentrated attention by the American practice of nominal self-government; but may he not learn how to govern himself in the later life and the larger experience? German children are so well governed during the elementary-school period that they must learn to govern themselves after they leave school and home—if at all. The question of the greater preponderance of children's crimes in our country is a serious one; and if substantiated by facts, it ought to receive the thoughtful attention of our people.

The special teacher is not regarded with favor by the critic in question. Teachers should be able to teach and supervise the subjects that are worth teaching. Supervisors of special subjects are unreasonable in their demands, and women teachers will slave to do their work, and thus dissipate the energy that should go for more legitimate studies. There is a considerable number of Americans who look upon the special teacher as a necessary evil, and who express the hope that these special supervisors may be dispensed with just as soon as teachers are competent to direct the new studies. But the foreign critic very properly asks: "Why not dispense with these special studies altogether until teachers are competent to teach them?"

This leads to the question of educational values in the United States, which, when determined at all, is very loosely determined. Temperance physiology is introduced into the schools, not because a body of educational specialists, physiologists, and medical men have passed upon its educational value and thoughtfully determined the same, but because a band of temperance reformers believe that such instruction will react against the drink habit. There is no unity in the American courses of study in consequence. Great liberty is given American school children in the selection of studies on the miscellaneous principle of "anything and everything," so that the little school work that the American child does is scattered in nature.

Two aspects of American methodology are severely arraigned—the influence of the kindergarten and the school recitation. The kindergarten, because of the preponderance of women teachers, has influenced unfavorably American elementary education. It has leavened all the lower grades; time is wasted, and school work degenerates into play; and women teachers, with naturally well-developed

æsthetic instincts, fritter away their time and the time of the children in school-room decorations of flowers, flags, leaves, and many-colored, distracting blackboard drawings. The American "recitation" (saying lessons to teachers) has always been roundly criticised by foreign educators. Such methods are antiquated and fail to impart instruction. It is not economical to devote so much time to digging out lessons as is required of American children. Granted that such methods cultivate power of individual work, there is manifest loss to the child. The German teacher imparts much more instruction than the American teacher; he is less dependent upon textbooks; and he requires more independent thinking from his pupils. The American practice, as the German-American critic points out, leads to undue memorizing, and with untrained minds to a real waste of energy. Many thoughtful people will agree with him that our elementary-school teachers (and secondary as well) devote too much of the school day to hearing lessons learned from schoolbooks, and too little time to imparting instruction; but so long as the half or more of our teaching force has had little more than an elementary-school course of instruction, the school textbook will be the measure of work.

One may not agree with all the conclusions reached by the German-American critic, but I am of the opinion that he has touched upon some of the weakest points in American elementary education.